

A Study of India-Japan Strategic and Security Issues

MOHAMMED BADRUL ALAM

This paper shows that India and Japan are acutely aware of the need for strategic and security cooperation between the two countries for ensuring order, stability and equilibrium among the region's great powers. Both the countries recognise that India-Japan cooperation and the process of engagement cannot be sustained on sheer expediency, episodic and transactional basis but has to be firmly rooted in shared values in both security and strategic terms. In view of the economic opportunities and geo-strategic compulsions between India and Japan, one hopes that the same momentum would be carried forward in 2013 and beyond toward a new paradigm of mutual benefit.

Framing the relationship within the Realist theoretical discourse of International Relations:

- “No nation can have a sure guide as to what it must do and what it need not do in foreign policy without accepting the national interest as that guide. ... Universal moral action cannot be applied to the action of states” (Hans J. Morgenthau, 1951)
- “The State's interests provides the spring of action” (Kenneth Waltz, 1979)
- “States seek power and they calculate their interests in terms of power” (Robert Keohane, 1986)
- “The international system is anarchic. The most basic motives driving states

is survival” (John Mearsheimer, 1994)

- “States are motivated primarily by national interests” (Robert Gilpin, 1996)
- “Japan and India enjoy deep mutual understanding and are fully committed to enhance the strategic and global partnership for peace and prosperity”

(Prime Ministers, Yoshihiko Noda and Dr. Manmohan Singh, 2011)

Power in the most generic term refers to the ability of influencing and articulating the behaviour of other states in order to achieve favorable outcome a state desires through attraction, inducement or coercion. Various national governments have at different times utilised their economic and military muscle in realising and enhancing their primary goals by increasing their raw power potential. The currency of power and security objectives are clearly evident in the 21st century globalised world with multiple transnational connectivity and changing contours of power. One can argue that India’s power has been enhanced in Asia Pacific in general and in context to Japan in particular. In this context, the foreign policy of India, like that of any other country, is shaped and influenced by geopolitics, geography, history, cultural parameters, and most importantly vital national interests. The changing economic, military and strategic environment in and around South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia has had its repercussions with India trying to reach out for new avenues for exercising greater mobility and flexibility in the regional sector for the conduct of its foreign policy. In this context, one important issue, namely, the issue of nuclear proliferation as well as related security issues has had their impact on India-Japan relations with profound policy ramifications.

Issue of Nuclear Proliferation and Related Security Issues

In view of the painful experience of being the only country in the world so far where nuclear bombs have been used to devastating effect, Japan has been overtly sensitive to any issues related to nuclear proliferation.

When India and Pakistan went for nuclear tests in May 1998, it was a rude shock to Japan’s sensibilities. Along with other Western countries and in particular the G-8 nations, Japan imposed severe economic sanctions on both India and Pakistan and accused them of flagrant violations of the letter and spirit of nuclear disarmament.

Japan, toward the end of 1999, provided indication in subtle terms to go soft on the continuance of economic sanctions on India. In an interview with *Daily Asahi Shimbun*, Vice-minister Ichita Yamamoto expressed his satisfaction with New Delhi’s “positive and forward-looking stance regarding signing CTBT and Japan’s inching towards ending economic sanctions against India.”¹

The aim of Japan-India strategic cooperation should not be viewed to target the containing of China but moderating and engaging proactively China's approaches to Asian and East Asian Security to the extent possible under 'conengagement'.

In the aftermath of the terrorist incidents of September 11, 2001, both India and Japan came closer in cooperating in various facets of the security perimeter affecting Central Asia, South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia. India had actively supported the anti-terrorist stand taken by Japan and had lauded Japan's decision to send S.D.F (Self-Defense Force) units to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean regions. India had also provided landing, refuelling and docking facilities to Japanese fighter jets and ships.

In the foreseeable future in terms of security cooperation, Japan and India, are likely to confine themselves to

- Energy Security
- Maritime Security
- Enhanced contacts between the Armed Forces of the India and Japan

In all these three security fields, as Subash Kapilla analyses, the operative principle should be that spheres of initiatives and cooperation are restricted to the bilateral context of Japan-India relations.² The aim of Japan-India strategic cooperation should not be viewed to target the containing of China but moderating and engaging proactively China's approaches to Asian and East Asian Security to the extent possible under 'conengagement'. Some observations from Kapilla are worth repeating, namely:

- Without getting overtly drawn into a United States- China strategic confrontation, countries such as Japan and India will be well advised to operate in close cooperation and in sync with each other and which could hopefully provide necessary counter-ballast for ensuring peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific.
- With Japan and India opting for strategic cooperation, the third big Asian power i.e. China would consequently accord much needed strategic space to these two powers thereby paving the way for a balanced Asian security.

Recognising that India and Japan have large Exclusive Economic Zones and maritime interests (including safe passage or Japanese oil tankers plying from the Persian Gulf to Strait of Malacca through Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal under protection from Indian Navy and the Coast Guard) there is a

need for enhanced cooperation in capacity building, technical assistance and information and data sharing between their respective agencies and to undertake anti-piracy measures in the high seas.

Similarly, regular exchange visits between the two Coast Guards through meetings of heads of Coast Guards, mutual visits of Coast Guard ships and holding of combined exercises are very important for both India and Japan in strengthening their respective security perimeters. In this context, the signing of a Memorandum on Cooperation between the Coast Guards was welcomed. Coming into force of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) and reaffirming to enhance cooperation in respect of anti-piracy countermeasures under its framework are welcome measures in this direction.

Japan and India condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and stress that there can be no justification whatsoever for any act of terrorism. They share the view that the international community must further intensify all out efforts and cooperation to fight this menacing threat to global peace and security. In this context, the two countries have pledged to work in unison through the India-Japan Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism. Both Japan and India have also called upon all Member States of the UN to work towards the expeditious adoption of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.³

Concluding Observations:

In contemporary times, from the time of Yoshiro Mori as Prime Minister, subsequent Japanese prime ministers in the recent past have shown real enthusiasm and made tangible efforts for the improvement of relationship with India.

After the mutual warmth in the 1950s during the Nehru era, India and Japan drifted apart during the Cold War.⁴ Shinzo Abe during his landmark August 2007 visit to India, however, traced his personal affinity towards India to the sentimental visit of his grandfather and Prime Minister of Japan, Nobusuke Kishi, who arrived in India during 1957 to a friendly reception from Jawaharlal Nehru. This great gesture was reciprocated by Japan when Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, during his visit to Tokyo in December 2006 was granted the honour of addressing the members of the Japanese Diet and a rare audience with the Japanese emperor. Subsequently, Dr. Singh's official visits to Japan in 2008 and 2010 as well were geared towards the advancement of strategic and economic partnership between India and Japan.

Second, the Indian political elite has increasingly looked to Japan as it steered towards a new proactive role and it has in turn looked at India as a hard power of 'coercion', soft power of 'attraction' and cultural super power of 'inducement' in Asia and the world. The new generation of leaders in Tokyo believed that Japan should shed its defensive posture about its imperial past and become a 'normal' power. From Abe to Noda, each of the Prime Ministers was also pressing ahead with Koizumi's agenda of unshackling Japan from its post Second World War political limitations and constitutional inhibitions on taking new, visible security responsibilities in Asia and beyond.

Third, the rise of China in recent years has compelled Japan to re-evaluate its own long-term options in Asia that many expect would inevitably become Sino-centric for maximising Chinese national interests. As Japan, much like the United States, hedges its bets against the rise of China including its assertiveness on matters related to South China Sea and Senkaku/Diaoyu island, political and security cooperation with India has become an imperative of Japan's new grand strategic calculus. However, Japan's new emphasis on a "global and strategic partnership" with India by no means implies that the two want to ally against China. In an age of rapid economic integration in Asia, China is already the largest trading partner of Japan and is set to acquire a similar status with India. The focus of both New Delhi and Tokyo is on widening the window of flexibility and opportunity in their conduct of foreign and security policies in Asia rather than seek an impossible containment of China that would provide no benefits to any party either in the short term or long term.

Fourth, while China will remain the key partner for Japan, Tokyo under Yoshihiko Noda was inclined to invest and enter into another important economic relationship for a possible multi-polar Asia. As a consequence, India has overtaken China as the largest recipient of Japan's overseas development assistance. As Japan fell behind China and Korea in taking advantage of India's economic reforms, Noda highlighted the need for engaging India and its emerging economy.

Finally, for the first time in the last sixty years, Noda injected the notion of shared and complementary political values into the bilateral discourse. Despite being two major working democracies in the world, the common vision of democracy has never figured in India-Japan relationship. With a firm commitment to openness and constructive engagement, the Indo-US nuclear deal, for example, promises to change New Delhi's standing in the global nuclear order and with Japan providing a helping hand to harness India tap nuclear energy in its civilian sector.

As Asia, the largest continent, undergoes major transformation in terms of power configurations, India and Japan are acutely aware of the need for political

and security cooperation between the two countries for ensuring order, stability and equilibrium among the region's great powers. Both the countries recognise that India-Japan cooperation and process of engagement cannot be sustained on sheer expediency but has to be firmly rooted in shared values in both economic and strategic terms. That precisely is why Dr. Manmohan Singh and Yoshihiko Noda found it so important to emphasise nourishment of democracy and liberal democratic values as the future bilateral political glue between the two Asian powers. In December 2011, Prime Minister of Japan, Yoshihiko Noda and Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh held the Annual Bilateral Summit in New Delhi. They discussed several important bilateral as well as regional and global issues. Both sides reaffirmed that Japan and India as partners share common values and strategic interests and have made a strong commitment to develop the Strategic and Global Partnership further for the deepening of their bilateral relations as well as peace and prosperity of the region and the world.⁵ In view of economic opportunities and geo-strategic compulsions between India and Japan, one hopes that under Japan's current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's stewardship, the same momentum would be carried forward in 2013 and beyond towards a new paradigm of mutual benefit on a win-win proposition.

Both the countries recognise that India-Japan cooperation and process of engagement cannot be sustained on sheer expediency but has to be firmly rooted in shared values in both economic and strategic terms.

Dr. **Mohammed Badrul Alam** is Professor, Dept. of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Jamia Millia Islamia University, Jamia Nagar, Okhla, New Delhi-110025

Notes

1. *India Today*, New Delhi, November 15, 1999, "Japan urges Pakistan to restore democracy, sign CTBT", <http://www.india-today.com/intoday/newsarchives/99/11/15/n45.shtml>, see, Miyashita, Akitoshi and Yoichiro Sato(eds.), *Japanese Foreign Policy in Asia and the Pacific*, New York: Palgrave Publications, 2001, also, see, Sanjana Joshi, *Changing Japan: Opportunities and Challenges for India*, Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2008
2. Dr.Subash Kapilla, "Japan-India Strategic Dialogue: A Misnomer", South Asia Analysis Group, Paper No. 2187, 29.03.2007, see, also, *The Japan Times*, February 15, 2012, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nb20120215d1.html>
3. from, Rediff.com, December 15, 2006, " India, Japan to establish Strategic Partnership, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2006/dec/15ind.htm>, also, see, Brahma Chellaney, " India-Japan Relationship: Shared Values to Shared Interests", *The Economic Times*, Delhi, December 29, 2011

4. C. Raja Mohan, "Visit of the Rising Ties", *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, December 14, 2006, <http://www.indianexpress.com/story/18476.html>, see, Panda, Rajaram and Yoo Fukazawa(eds.), *India and Japan: Blossoming of a New Understanding*, New Delhi: Lancer Books, 2004, also, see, Dharmdasani, M.D, *Indo-Japan Relations: Challenges and Opportunities*, New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2004, see, Jithin George, "India-Japan Relations at 60: Setting the Stage for Kizuna", Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Delhi, Article No.3561, 20 January 2012, <http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/india-japan-relations-at-60-setting-the-stage-for-kizuna-3561.html>
5. Ibid, C.Raja Mohan, No.27, also, see, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/india/pmv0912/joint.html>

References

- C. Raja Mohan, "Visit of the Rising Ties", *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, December 14, 2006.
- Dharmdasani, M.D, *Indo-Japan Relations: Challenges and Opportunities*, New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2004.
- Drifte, Reinhard, *Japan's Foreign Policy in the 1990s: From Economic Super Power to What Power?*, London: Macmillan Press, 1996.
- Jain, Purnendra C.(ed.) *Distant Neighbours: Japan and South Asia*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1996.
- Keshavan, K.V(ed.), *Building a Global Partnership: Fifty Years of Indo-Japanese Relations*, New Delhi: Lancer Books, 2002.
- Lim Hua Sing, *Japan's Role in Asia: Mutual Development and Ruthless Competition*, Singapore: Eastern University Press, 2003.
- Masako Fukuda, "India Blasts Fire up Resistance to Nuclear Weapons in Japan", *Nikkei Weekly*, 18 May 1998, p.1.
- Mattoo, Amitabh, "India's Strategic and Foreign Policy Perceptions", in Keshavan, K.V(ed.), *Building a Global Partnership: Fifty Years of Indo-Japanese Relations*, New Delhi: Lancer Books, 2002.
- Miyashita, Akitoshi and Yoichiro Sato (eds.), *Japanese Foreign Policy in Asia and the Pacific*, New York: Palgrave Publications, 2001.
- Murthy, P.A.Narasimha, *India and Japan: Dimensions of their Relations*, New Delhi: Lancer Books, 1993.
- Panda, Rajaram, *Japan and the Third World: Political and Economic Interactions 1980s-1990s*, New Delhi: Lancer Books, 1994.
- Panda, Rajaram and Kazuo Ando (eds.), *India and Japan Multi-dimensional Perspectives*, New Delhi: Lancer Books, 1997.
- Panda, Rajaram and Yoo Fukazawa (eds.), *India and Japan: Blossoming of a New Understanding*, New Delhi: Lancer Books, 2004.
- Rajesh Kapoor, "Dawn of a New Era in India-Japan Relations", Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, Article No.2177, 4 January 2007.
- Rukmani Gupta, "PMs Japan Visit", Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, Article No.2185, 9 January 2007.
- Dr.Subash Kapilla, "Japan-India Strategic Dialogue: A Misnomer", South Asia Analysis Group, Paper No. 2187, 29.03.2007.
- Wolf Mendel, *Japan's Asia Policy: Regional Security and Global Interests*, New York: Routledge, 1995.